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'El dios dinero es el que manda'.
Nature as a Field of Force in the Western Highlands of Guatemala

Abstract:

This article discusses the way in which the construction of a variety of territorial narratives is developed in the Western highlands of Guatemala. In a globalizing world, different meanings that are attributed to nature are often conflictive and indefinite. In the Guatemalan Highlands, these frequently competing ideas of what nature 'is' and what it 'should be' are elucidated by means of territorial narratives. Meanings given to nature are often expressions of establishing or negotiating 'power', relating to intrinsic cultural, political and physical aspect of that particular territory. In this article we approach nature as a source of negotiation and conflict, as a "field of force". We analyze this field of force through the unravelling of different territorial narratives constructed in the context of globalization: nature as a commodity to be extracted, nature as territory, and nature as a sacred and cultural tourist destination. These narratives are constructed on different levels within the perspective of, and related to global trends of massive resource extraction, ecotourism and the globalization of rights. Discussing these narratives that are shaped in the negotiations over nature and environmentalism, we explain the intensity and ambiguousness of these conflicts.

Keywords: Territorial Narratives, Guatemala, Commodity, Nature, Environmentalism

1. Introduction

In this article we analyse how the meaning of 'nature' is negotiated in the Western Highlands of Guatemala in the context of massive resource extraction, the globalization of indigenous rights and expanding ecotourism. In order to justify ideas about and control over meanings of land and its resources, different actors engage in processes of constructing territorial narratives in which 'nature' is a central element. The Guatemalan government and mining companies consider 'nature' as a natural resource that can be deployed to alleviate poverty by way of extracting its subsoil resources. In ecotourism 'nature' is imagined as a resource that generates income by safeguarding it according to (Western) ideas about what nature should look like. At the same time, indigenous groups claim their spiritual rights to territory, referring to their cosmovision in which nature is a central element. At times, such narratives become further politicized when people not only attach spiritual, but also political meanings to nature and territory in order to actively resist processes of territorialization by the Guatemalan state. Negotiations about these different meanings of nature are often conflictive: Guatemala has witnessed an increase in socio-environmental conflicts in which different understandings of nature are a key point (see, for example Urkidi 2011, Costanza 2015, Vogt 2015, among many others). Conflicts over such meanings represent power relations and, as most other conflicts related to natural resources, are not only about 'nature' but also (if not foremost) about who decides about development. It is a battle over authority, legitimacy and citizenship (Peluso and Vandergeest 1995, Boelens 2008, Rasch 2012).

The aim of this article is to unravel 'nature' as a field of force in Guatemala and as such to disclose how conflicts over meanings of nature are inherently political and represent and inform conflicts over natural resources at the same time. Nuijten (2005) has conceptualised force fields as structural forms of power relations, which are shaped around the access to, and use of, specific resources. Force fields (or fields of force, as we call them) cohere around certain problems and resources and lead to forms of ordering in which socio-political categories with differing positions and interests define themselves. We argue that in order to understand contemporary socio-environmental conflicts, it is important to unravel, first, the different meanings that people attach to nature and, second, how such meanings are made instrumental to gain control over nature and provide important arguments in conflicts over access to natural resources. Such an analysis is relevant for understanding the manifestation of socio-environmental conflicts in Guatemala, where the indigenous population has been excluded from main domains of political decision making processes regarding the lands that they use, inhabit and perform their rituals on. Guatemala has witnessed an increase in socio-environmental conflicts in which different understandings of nature are a key point (Urkidi 2011, Costanza 2015, Vogt 2015). Different valuations of 'nature' are often at the root of such conflicts (Muradian et al 2003). These processes are multilayered and embedded in a long history of violence and exclusion.

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2. Nature as a Field of Force

To capture the intrinsic relationship of meanings of nature with politics, spirituality and social conflicts over natural resources, we use Guha and Martinez –Alier's notion of 'varieties of environmentalisms' (Martinez–Alier & Guha 1997). In their 1997 volume on varieties in environmentalisms, they convincingly show that environmentalism is not only a phenomenon in the global North, but that people in the South can also be 'green' although this 'being green' has other roots and manifestations. Such environmentalisms often have their root in poverty and social conflict over resources. In this article we analyse how such environmentalisms are constructed, making use of the idea of 'territorial narratives'.

Territorial narratives are constructed as representative for different environmentalisms. Territorial narratives have a clear territorial dimension for those who enunciate them and focus on the characteristics of the territory that are most functional for the argument that is proposed by the narrative (Damonte 2009). Territorial narratives are constructed with the aim of territorializing space with the objective of establishing control over natural resources and the people who use them (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). This process is about excluding and including people within the boundaries of a territory and can therefore be considered a claim, a way of governmentalizing space (Foucault in Peluso & Lund 2011). Along these lines, territory is ascribed sociocultural, historical and/or physical characteristics that support the argument of the projected narrative with the intention of gaining 'control' (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, Damonte 2009, Rasch 2013).

The 'echelon of rights', developed by Boelens and Zwarteveen to analyze water conflicts (Boelens 2008), is useful to analyze how different territorial narratives are constructed and represent different actors and interests, as it captures the different levels of abstraction of environmental conflicts: the struggle over material means (resources), the contest over rights and operational norms (rules), the decision-making authority and the legitimacy of rights systems (regulatory control), and, finally, the diverging discourses that defend or challenge particular policies, normative constructs and regimes of representation. These different levels of abstraction also become visible in the narratives that are constructed in the negotiations over nature.

To sum up, to analyze nature as a field of force we use three interrelated concepts: the notion of different environmentalisms, territorial narratives and the echelon of rights. We consider environmentalism to be rooted in different territorial narratives, which we consider to be made up of the echelon of rights.

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3. Methodology

The case studies presented in this article are based on field work in Guatemala by both authors. Gijs Cremers carried out research on the meaning of sacred natural sites, ecotourism, Maya spirituality and processes of territorialization in relation to local and global (environmental) dynamics. The research was conducted in the second half of 2014 and information was gathered using qualitative research methods, primarily based on participant observation among tour guides, tourists, the indigenous community and spiritual leaders in Laguna de Chicabal and (eco)tour agencies in Quetzaltenango. Furthermore, he conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with twelve tour guides and (eco)tour agencies in Quetzaltenango, sixteen spiritual leaders in and around Laguna de Chicabal and several tourists visiting both places. Next to that, photography as a research method was applied, adding to the value of the analysis since the visual images called upon dialogue on issues taken for granted within the research community. As such, photos were shown to research participants and photos of important places and objects were shot by research participants, invoking conversation and discussion on a visual representation of the area and different artifacts.

Elisabet Dueholm Rasch has conducted research on activism, the meaning of land and mining (and other megaprojects) since 2009, as a continuation of her PhD research (field work: 18 months). The material presented in this article was collected during field work between 2009 and 2013. During this field work, the author applied different qualitative ethnographic methods; conducting participant observation in different activist meetings, and as observer in an indigenous consultation in San Francisco la Unión. The heart of the material, however, consists of unstructured and semi-structured interviews that the author conducted as part of the research with fifteen members of NGO's local activists, regional and national leaders between 2010 and 2012. In both cases, the authors triangulated data from interviews with observations, (semi)textual artefact analysis and informal conversations. (Semi)textual artefacts include posters, meeting minutes, flyers and newspaper articles. In this way, the internal validity of both case studies was secured (Bernard 2011, Madden 2010).

Both authors kept field logs, and made reflective and consolidated field notes during field work. These notes were discussed and compared during several meetings in order to deduct important themes and topics. From the elements that emerged from the field work material, we deduced the 'territorial narratives' that we will present in this article. We consider narratives as social constructs that are able to represent complex situations that are understandable for everyone. As such, narratives provide a context in which we locate ourselves, where to situate our ideas, values and actions and eventually predict the future (Gónzalez 2006). Territorial narratives provide people with logical explanatory systems that allow them to engage with the territory they live in.

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The article proceeds as follows. We will discuss three territorial narratives that compete for power and legitimacy in the Western Highlands of Guatemala in three separate sections: nature as source for large-scale development, nature as territory and nature as a sacred site to attract tourists with. These narratives are constructed in the context of, and at the same time dialectically informed by, global trends of massive resource extraction, ecotourism and the globalization of rights. At the same time, these narratives are multi-layered and dynamic. Additionally, as we will show, the narratives become more complex and contradictory as we move from the global and national to the local level. The territorial narratives that we discuss represent different environmentalisms and are constructed by different actors. We unravel each territorial narrative, using the echelon of rights as developed by Boelens (2008).

4. Guatemala's Highlands and Massive Resource Extraction, the Globalization of Rights and Expanding Ecotourism

Territorial narratives in Guatemala are shaped and negotiated by both local and global actors, such as indigenous communities, mining companies, and (eco)tourists, who continually develop (different) claims to territory (Damonte 2009, Rasch 2013). In what follows we discuss the sites and actors that are involved in these negotiations over nature and in the construction of related territorial narratives. We will embed this in the socio-political history of Guatemala, as history is often central to territorial narratives and partly explain the contemporary dynamic character of nature as a field of force.

The issues of territorialization, Maya spirituality and territorial rights cannot be understood without taking into consideration the violent past, which provides a background for expression of contemporary Maya identity (Carlsen 1997, Fischer & Hendrickson 2003: 67, Brown 2004). Between 1960 and 1996 Guatemala was plunged into an internal conflict in which the indigenous population was faced with (cultural) repression, extreme violence and the deprivation of (spiritual) rights (Fischer & Hendrickson 2003: 67, Ybarra 2012). Throughout the conflict, sacred sites were designated 'subversive' and conducting ceremonies and other forms of expressing indigenous identity became an act of insubordination (Ybarra 2012). In the 1970s the guerrilla movement, the Guatemalan Army of the Poor (EGP - *Ejército Guatemalteco de los Pobres*), gained ground in the Western Highlands as a reaction to the destruction of indigenous communities — as a part of the scorched earth tactic — by the military. It goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the atrocities that took place during the war, but it is essential to note that it had a tremendous impact on the communities the Western Highlands.

The return to civilian rule in 1986 paved the way for peace negotiations between the state and the guerrilla organization *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG, National Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity). The Maya Movement [1] became an important political actor

during the democratization process and succeeded in putting indigenous issues on the table of the peace negotiations. In 1996, the peace negotiations were concluded. As part of the peace negotiations, the rights of Guatemala's indigenous population were laid down in the Accord of Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (AIDPI – *Acuerdo de la identidad y los derechos de los pueblos indígenas*), signed in 1995. At the same time, the indigenous population gained access to global legal repertoires such as internationally recognized human and indigenous rights conventions (Warren 1998, Sieder 2002, Hale 2006). In 1995 the Guatemalan State also signed Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO 169). This document includes numerous indigenous rights and has served as an important point of reference in the formulation of claims by the Maya Movement and by indigenous movements in the rest of Latin America; it can be considered as part of the globalization of indigenous rights. Both documents establish the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes on the development in territories where they live, as well as the spiritual rights of indigenous peoples. This recognition of indigenous rights to territory and spirituality should be considered within the wider context of the recognition of indigenous rights and the rise of indigenous movements in Latin America (Sieder 2007, Bastos and Camus 2003).

As such, an important part of the peace process has been reclaiming natural and historical sacred places (Ybarra 2012) and a variety of groups have been promoting "ethnic pride and [have created] a sanctioned public space for Maya culture" (Fischer & Hendrickson 2003: 73). This included recovering sacred places and using these to openly express and practice religious customs (Ybarra 2012). In this process the (re)construction of Maya identity and spirituality is used to obtain and maintain an active call for territorial rights (Montejo 1999: 157-162, Sieder 2007). Today, for 40% of the indigenous population that resides in the Guatemalan highlands, reclaiming their lands in order to survive is a crucial part of daily life. Ybarra (2012) stresses that while the Guatemalan state is reluctant to grant territorial rights to a 'Maya collectivity', organizations that advocate Maya spiritual rights are embracing the idea of legalization of, for example, natural sacred places. This is because a great variety of these places in the region are believed to possess intrinsic (ceremonial) energy, which enhances mediation between the human world and the 'powers-that-be' (Carlsen 1997, Fischer & Hendrickson 2003, Brown 2004). The importance of natural sacred spaces in Maya culture is rooted in history and time, and the meaning given to sacred places is constantly negotiated.

Parallel to providing more space and autonomy for indigenous peoples and the recognition of indigenous political and spiritual rights, the state reformed the Mining Law in 1997. Until that time, Guatemala's natural resources had remained largely unexplored due to the civil war. The liberalization of the Mining Law made it extremely attractive for foreign companies to invest in this sector. Since then, the Guatemalan government has been granting concessions to transnational mining companies without consulting the population that actually lives in these territories. This is in sharp contrast with efforts that the same state made to decentralize development and recognize the

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rights and identity of the indigenous population (Sieder 2007). The liberalization of the Mining Law reflects neoliberal development policies that are often not compatible with indigenous cosmovision and identity (Holden & Jacobsen 2008). It is a way of territorializing nature in which it becomes framed as a natural resource that can be extracted. Such a process of territorialization often does not respect the rights of indigenous peoples, nor does it include the role of municipal and local authorities as agents of their own development.

Along the same line, ecotourism has developed rapidly in Guatemala. Nature has been conceptualised within a mainly Western environmental framework and partly commoditized. Ecotourism has been become one of the fastest growing sectors of the global tourist industry over the last two decades. Regardless of many contradictions, "defences and critiques of ecotourism both share the assumption that it constitutes a promising route for generating benefits for those living close to tropical biodiversity without undermining its existence" (Agrawal & Redford 2006: 20). The ways local networks interact with global actors in this arena in order to create this 'promising route', however, are ambiguous. Ecotourism is not always considered the best option. As a consequence of the ecological richness on the slopes of Laguna de Chicabal for example, the municipality of San Martín Sacatepéquez and the *Asociación de Agricultores Ecológicos Laguna de Chicabal* (ASAECO) have officially deemed it a natural and cultural monument and protected area. Nevertheless, the Maya Mam who live near the volcano depend on the constant availability of their ceremonial places in order to sustain in their (spiritual) livelihoods. The shore around the crater lake is home to approximately 25 ceremonial Maya sites and recently constructed eco-lodges in *Laguna Seca* – on the lower side of the volcano – are frequently used by indigenous cultural and community-based movements, emphasizing the entanglement of ecotourism, indigenous culture and global dynamics on a community level. In sum, many different actors move around on this particular field of force, that is 'nature', all giving meaning to nature as way of legitimizing ideas and positions on its meaning: tourists, tourist operators, the state, mining companies, anti-mining activists, spiritual leaders and conservationists. In what follows we will unravel the territorial narrative that different actors construct. In the conclusion we will reflect on how these narratives relate to each other.

5. Nature as a Source for Large-Scale (Neoliberal) Development

"Guatemala is favored by nature and counts with a mineral potential, which responsible exploitation is compatible with the environment and its natural resources, just like with the needs of the communities." [2]

The above quote, taken from the website of the Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mines, demonstrates how nature is considered a natural resource that can be exploited in order to alleviate poverty and promote development in Guatemala without doing harm to the environment. As such, one of the main arguments of the Guatemalan government to grant concessions to transnational mining companies in this area is 'development'. An important element of this way of framing nature

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is the idea that mining can be sustainable. This is based on the following premises: 1) mining catalyzes development, 2) technical fixes can solve almost every problem and 3) those opposed to mining mainly comprise ignorant and 'anti-development' communities and NGOs (Whitmore 2006). [3] The idea of sustainable mining almost promotes itself as a way of being green, as an environmentalism rooted in the richness of natural resources in terms of minerals, without harming community life, nor the environment. 'Nature' is considered a source for development in this territorial narrative, but as a development without negative ecological or social consequences.

The main actors that construct the 'nature as development narrative' are the Guatemalan government and (mostly Canadian) mining companies. They have one common interest although they might follow different logics of action: economic development. The government believes in mining as a way of generating development through employment and mineral rents; the mining companies use the logic of a profit organization. In this territorial narrative, exploiting nature is considered in the interest of Guatemala as it can help development at the national level. At the same time, this argument is at times voiced in terms of interests for the people, as a way for all Guatemalans to get out of poverty. This is supported by the World Bank as a strategy for poverty alleviation and employment (Bastos & Brett, 2010), and fits within the general trend of Latin American governments considering mining and other mega-projects as the best way of 'development' (Moody 2007). The World Bank has, for example, provided the Canadian company Glamis Gold Ltd.'s Montana Exploradora Marlin Project in Guatemala with a loan of $45 million (World Bank, 2010). At the same time, local governments often diverge from the position of the national government, putting them in a difficult position: the national government might pressure municipal mayors to go along with mining plans (see also Dougherty 2011).

Approaching nature and its resources as a source for large-scale development infringes on indigenous livelihood strategies and spirituality, and there has been a lot of resistance against this form of territorialization. We will discuss that more in-depth when we come to the next territorial narrative on nature. What is important to understand here is that an important element of the 'nature as development narrative' is the actual delegitimization of the resistance against it. One of the most important actors in this process is the *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo* (Foundation against terrorism). Due to these processes of delegitimization, many activists say that the interests go beyond the economic. They consider mining to be a new system of dispossession and a new way of controlling the population. Taking control of the land as a source for large-scale economic development is considered a way to recolonize the land (field notes Elisabet Dueholm Rasch; 2010, 2012) as the revenues will benefit foreign companies and the state, rather than the local inhabitants for whom nature is an important element of livelihood and worldview. Mining represents, according to many activists, just one more act of expropriation and exploitation that can be added to a history of exclusion of the indigenous population (Mérida & Krenmayr, 2008: 11).

This idea of expropriation and dispossession is confirmed by the way the Guatemalan government goes about the rules and regulations involved. First, the Guatemalan State has

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neglected agreements that secure indigenous rights to participation in development and has granted licenses to transnational mining companies without consulting the population that actually live on the relevant territories. In Guatemala, subsoil resources are property of the state, and it can thus decide what happens to these resources. The state, then, can grant permission for extraction to foreign companies. However, as discussed in the former section, indigenous communities also have rights, which are laid down in international agreements. These rights determine that indigenous peoples should be consulted when it comes to decisions regarding their land and territory. Second, governmental policies have been supported by forces that operate outside the governmental system. One of the actors is the aforementioned *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo*. These actors actively support nature as a source for development narrative by delegitimizing its opponents. Strategies that are used to do this mainly consist of criminalizing, terrorizing and discarding social mobilization against megaprojects that involve the extraction of natural resources.

The most important strategy in this effort is the violation of human rights in the name of democracy and development. This can range from death threats to denigrations on social media to paid campaigns in newspapers. An example comes from the *Fundación Contra el Terrorismo*:

> In recent declarations of leaders of organizations that are supposed to defend human rights and the environment they have brought some numbers out in the public that do not do more than offend the intelligence of the Guatemalan people. To justify their existence through victimization, they have come to the extreme to say that 28 of their militants have been murdered. [4]

This is a reaction to a letter that was written by the anthropologist Irma Alicia Velazquez, who voiced her iniquity about the death threats, illegal detentions and actual deaths that have happened in the realm of mobilization against nature as a source for development. The founder of this 'anti-terrorist organization', Ricardo Rafael Mendez Ruiz Valdes, was also involved in framing activists that were engaged in a manifestation against a dam in Barillas (Huehuetenango) as 'terrorists'. Ruiz Valdes has been accused of spreading materials that: "[...] constitute massive attacks towards the defenders of human rights, their liberties and their fundamental rights, as well as towards their lifes, their dignity, personal integrity, security, liberty of action and association." In most cases it is not possible to prove processes of criminalization. However, as Sibrián and van der Borgh (2014) say, it is important to document and take serious experiences of criminalization; many activists experience the policy of the state as a way of 'closing all doors' and 'having a plan against social movements' (interviews 2012).

In sum, the 'nature as a source for development' narrative focuses on the natural resources as central elements for a neoliberal development strategy. Massive resource extraction is considered the way to alleviate poverty and is presented as a viable way of providing people with new ways to make a living. 'Nature' then turns into a natural resource and becomes a commodity, and the central government is considered the representative authority to make decisions about it.

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The central elements of this narrative are directly opposed to the following narrative that we shall discuss: the 'nature as territory' narrative.

6. Nature as Territory

> When we enter the salon municipal three reinas indígenas are talking to the people in the salon. They are talking about the importance of reviving Maya culture, about how mining threatens Maya identity and territory. How important it is to safeguard this. When we talk afterwards, they tell me how important they find it to be against mining, as it 'has very negative impacts on nature' and because they do not want to give birth to children with, for example, only one arm --as has happened in other communities. On our way to the next community, I sit next to the municipal council member from another municipality, who is visiting the community consultation out of solidarity. He tells me that he is interested in learning about how communities are organizing. When we arrive, we are just in time for the speech of a member of the national board of CPO (Concejo del Pueblo Maya – Council of the Maya People) – and old friend of mine who has been involved in several local Maya political initiatives. He talks about the necessity of organizing local community consultations and the duty to protect nature and its resources. The representatives from the Human Rights office in Quetzaltenango are also invited to reflect on the community consultations from a human rights perspective. In their discourse, they emphasize the right to organize local consultations. When we get back to the central salon of the consultation, the counting of the votes is about to begin. As we enter the municipal hall, my eye catches a poster on the wall, and again I am struck by the sentence 'cuidar nuestro medio ambiente es nuestro deber (to take care of the environment is our duty)'. At the end of the evening there's no doubt; the San Francisco population is against mining, and against electric wiring across their territory. Because it is a duty to defend nature and its resources, not only a right (field notes Elisabet Dueholm Rasch, November 2013).

The fragment above shows different elements that are important in the construction of the 'nature as territory' narrative: the diversity of actors that is involved in constructing the narrative, the central elements of the narratives in terms of the necessity to take care of nature. We will explore these elements in more depth below.

In the narrative that frames nature as territory, nature is described as something that is inherently political. It is, as Boelens (2008) and many others have noticed, often not only about nature, but about who can decide what happens to nature and how this is done (Fulmer et al. 2008). The territorial narrative contains different important elements. The first element is the Maya identity that is considered within this narrative to be inherently rooted in sacred meanings of land and other natural resources. On the basis of this identity, the indigenous population can also formulate their relationship to the land as a political right. So, as an activist would say, '*as Mayas, we say NO to mining'*. This is a way the narrative is constructed on the national level as part of indigenous resistance against mining. Closely related are other elements of the narrative: ecological rights, e.g. the right to health, to clean water and a sane environment. Often these ecological rights are framed as being specifically important for the indigenous people as environment and nature take on a

specific place in their worldview. In some cases an element of gender has been added to this discourse; women sometimes formulate their claims in terms of liberation of the female body (Rasch 2012). These three elements all come together in one central claim against 'neoliberalism' in which the state and mining companies are put forward as 'capitalist' and 'the enemy'. Indigenous people are portrayed as real owners of the land, inhabitants of nature, have the right to decide on nature and what happens to it. To justify this, natural resources are framed in terms of territorial – political as well as sacred – rights.

Nature and its resources are often related to the sacredness of the territory since indigenous people often advocate a strong connection with (self)declared sacred territory (e.g. volcanoes, lakes, mountaintops) in their claim making and struggle for territorial rights. As such, spirituality and sacred places are important elements of the 'nature as territory' narrative. Besides serving as a key location for ceremonies and traditional indigenous education, sacred sites relate to livelihoods, (ecological, cultural and spiritual) well-being and 'cultural services' (Verschuuren 2012). Sacred natural sites generate both cultural and ecotourism as well as spiritual pilgrimage, supposedly making the places a substantial contributor to local economic activity (Verschuuren 2012: 5). Recently, sacred sites have also become of interest to scholars interested in ecosystems, who have been promoting 'the integration of cultural concerns in ecology and conservation' (Verschuuren 2012: 5). As such, sacred sites in the region are a crossroads of Maya spirituality, ecotourism and political activity and can be considered important centers of both material and 'intangible' cultural and ecological manifestations (e.g. Fischer & Hendrickson 2003, Brown 2004, Martain-Haverbeck 2006, Brown & Emery 2008). From this perspective, the declaration of Lake Chicabal as a 'cultural and natural territory' can also be considered as a way of establishing territorial power over territory.

The way people claim rights to territory are closely related to the actual claims they make; these claims are rooted in and justified by international as well as national legislation and agreements, and related to individual as well as collective group rights. Some of the strategies that people employ include marches and road blocks, but the most popular way of claiming 'the right to territory' is by way of organizing community consultations via the legal path, most of the times rooted in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Municipal Code, the Law on Rural Development Committees, the Guatemalan Constitution, the Agreement on the Rights and Identity of Indigenous Peoples, the ILO 169. These consultations have been widely studied (see for example Van de Sandt 2009, Urkidi 2011, Costanza 2011, Rasch 2012, among others).

Such community consultations should be considered within the general tendency of employing indigenous legal activism as a way of resisting mega-projects in Guatemala (Sieder 2007 and 2011). Since 2004 more than seventy community consultations have been organized in Guatemala, in which the population decided not to agree with future mining activities. The best known (and studied) was the Sipakapa consultation in 2005 (Van de Sandt, 2009; Yagenova & García, 2009; Dougherty, 2011; Urkidi, 2011). In the narrative of nature as territory, nature is made instrumental by different actors. Indigenous activists, lawyers and community leaders resort to the

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courts to claim their rights, combining international agreements, national legislation and indigenous law. Through providing legal advice, formulating law proposals and bringing cases to human rights courts, indigenous activists demand participation in decision-making processes regarding natural resources and development (Rasch 2012).

The 'nature as territory' narrative is constructed at the local, regional and national level and claims territory on different scales, applying different levels of legislation. The way nature is framed in this narrative is informed by globalized discourses of indigenous rights to territory and indigenous rights, as well as by Guatemala's violent past. Often, elements of indigenous identity are emphasized to make the argument stronger. In this process, local communities not only contest their right to natural resource use or access to land, but also question who the decision-making authority is and construct their own discourse to defend their normative constructs (Boelens 2008). This has led to a polarized situation in Guatemala, where actors that construct this narrative have come to be considered diametrically opposed to the state and mining companies. As we will see in the elaboration of the following territorial narrative, these apparently diametrical dimensions of territorial narratives are negotiated at the local level.

7. Nature as a Cultural and Ecological Tourist Destination

'Come with me' Rodrigo says, smiling and avoiding eye contact. He urges me to follow him as I get up from my seat – a decaying tree trunk – and walks across an open space on the forested slope. We walk through a variety of tropical flowers and plants. Birds are singing from the dense canopy. The warmth of the afternoon sun has yet to dry the morning dew and a smell of wet vegetation and mud is still recognizable. We walk up a slippery dirt road and pass a barking dog, Rodrigo always three steps ahead of me. We chat about Guatemalan history, contemporary politics and about the current natural backdrop. Rodrigo, a 37-year old Maya Mam *ajq'ij* – a Maya daykeeper or spiritual guide –, seems to know everything about the sacred volcano we are climbing; about its history, its place within the Mayan worldview and about its ecological significance. We walk by an old Ceiba tree and Rodrigo lectures me about its importance within local *Cosmovisión* as he lectures me about the meaning of nearly everything around us. Regardless what I notice or point out, Rodrigo would enlighten me with ongoing, exciting and remarkable stories.

The way Rodrigo explains about the setting and the meaning of nature and its sacredness shows how he employs his knowledge about the territory and how he – and, as he assures me, a vast majority of the local community – relates to his surroundings. These indigenous ecological narratives are frequently heard and reproduced by many *ajq'ij'ab* (plural) and the local indigenous population. Ethnic and spiritual identity is strongly rooted in the landscape; the exceptional geography of Laguna de Chicabal forms the foundation of local spiritual life. And indeed Maya spiritual guides include these surroundings – i.e. volcanoes, mountains, caves, and forests – in

ceremonial recitations and daily life. The landscape does not only exist in a physical state, but captures a much broader and more intangible realm in which specific religious and non-religious worldviews are enacted and negotiated. People depend on the land for their well-being, bringing about a new layer of tensions regarding the meaning of nature. Chicabal, meaning 'good place' in Maya Mam, is an important sacred natural site in the western Quetzaltenango area and altars around the lake are visited the entire year, following the *Cholq'ij* – the Maya calendar.

As a result the territorial dimension of the area is thus shaped by natural and sacred (or both) arguments. The story of Rodrigo above reflects how he constructs territorial narratives around this area and in what way he gives meaning to what he labels 'his ancestral grounds'. "Nature as a whole is more important to the local community than it is to foreigners," he says. By explicitly stating that this territory 'belongs' to the local community and that the value of (sacred) nature can "only be understood [in this way]" by the local community, he constructs a territorial narrative that encompasses a more local claim for land and spiritual rights. Chicabal and 'its nature' becomes important for (self) identification and cultural and religious values. Nature, then, becomes a sociocultural and spiritual construct, with ideas about what nature is and can become "for and by humans" (Dressler 2011). Several actors are involved in the making of this nature.

Since the park around Laguna de Chicabal has been declared a natural and cultural monument, eco- and cultural tourism have increased and both physical and spiritual territorial boundaries have changed. Newman states that "[t]he proponents of a cultural globalization argue that the sense of belonging to a specific […] territory has been replaced (or at least is being replaced) by a deterritorialized and borderless world" (2008: 61). While borders between states become easier to cross, other more unclear territorial boundaries appear. Notions of cultural, social, economic and religious boundaries in relation to territory are influenced by global dynamics (ibid.). This is especially noticeable at sacred natural places such as Chicabal, as frictions that arise as a result of the confluence of different actors are at the same time a local issue (local cosmology, 'traditional' education, [spiritual] livelihoods) and a global issue ([eco]tourism, environmental organizations, and mining corporations). The outline of these particular boundaries is constructed from different angles and points of view.

An example of these vaguer boundaries comes to the fore as we zoom in on the case of Quetzaltenango's ecotourism industry. As a fairly recent phenomenon, ecotourism in Guatemala crosses territorial boundaries without clear – and oftentimes unrecognizable due to historical or (local) cultural – physical limits. The general idea of ecotourism is that it facilitates rural development by, for example, generating and diversifying income possibilities. It provides a greater variety of activities within a region and thus complements cultural tourism next to reducing environmental shocks. However, in order to do so, ecotourism is required to meet the needs of both locals and tourists and thus "need[s] to be based on the preferences of the tourists and locals as well as the physical characteristics of the area […] especially […] in areas with historic civil conflict and areas where tourists and residents represent distinct social and cultural groups" (Hearne and Santos

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2005). The latter is especially the case near Chicabal, although ecotourism in the area has developed poorly over time and most of the local community is disconnected from ecotourism related money flows. Furthermore, many spiritual guides in Chicabal feel that their sacred surroundings, altars and ceremonial places are indeed protected by ASAECO to some extent as the organization clearly asks tourists, for example, to not leave any garbage and swim in the sacred volcanic lake, but feel left out of decision-making when it comes to considering the local environment and the sacred crater lake. This is, among other things, caused by the fact that most members of ASAECO are evangelical and do not, in the eyes of most spiritual guides, consider the volcano as a sacred 'being' (Taylor 2005).

Rain is pouring down on the tin roofs and quieting life on the streets as I walk around looking for María Elena's house in Quetzaltenango's *Zona 1*. "Just look for the small red house with the wooden door," my point of reference, not nearly enough information to make her home easy to locate. María Elena was born and bred in San Martín Sacatepéquez and moved to Quetzaltenango to find a job in tourism at the age of 27. She worked as a teacher at a Spanish school and behind the desk of a travel agency but has dedicated recent years of her life taking care of her family. When I finally find the house – a wooden door indeed – she is waiting for me on the patio with fresh made instant coffee and *pancitos dulces*. María Elena vividly remembers when more tourists started showing up in Chicabal. She tells that the area has changed over time. "The community has only profited little from tourism in Chicabal, only the people who know their way around foreigners, speak Spanish or even English, and people who live very close to the volcano." She pauses for a second, takes a sip from her coffee and continues. "For example, most travel agencies hire guides from Quetzaltenango, they don't care more about Laguna de Chicabal as they care about tours to Zunil or Salcajá. Local knowledge should be used as well for tourism to be profitable for the community of San Martín." María Elena claims that ecotourism alone is not enough to prevent damage to local territory near Chicabal, repeatedly telling me that local networks need restructuring, and local, community-based tourism in San Martín Sacatepéquez is needed for the community to benefit from the nearby national park. "Tourism is a good source of income and would increase employment for the people in the community [of San Martín], but who will prepare them for tourists? A lot of people do not speak Spanish very well. They have neither hot water nor a good meal to offer and they don't recognize the foreigners' way of thinking. Then tourists, would they live under such conditions? Xela [Quetzaltenango] is only an hour away. I don't think so. It is a task for the government to show people's 'normal live' in Guatemala, but they profit from Antigua, from Tikal, and from Atitlán; the small communities here are not important enough."

Like in the indigenous ecological narrative, elements that come to the fore in the María Elena's story are rooted more locally. Territory here is framed within both an ecological as an (eco)touristic narrative. According to this narrative, the idea of nature around Chicabal is negotiated by different actors. Next to indigenous communities, tourists have a great impact on how 'nature' is shaped and how the claim for 'rights' and 'power' is distributed. The ascribed characteristics change

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as the narrative changes. Most (eco)tourists for example aspire a more 'authentic' and 'pristine' vision of culture and nature. The idea that ecotourism generates income has led to the construction of infrastructure (i.e. roads, lodges) on and around Chicabals volcanic crater, 'destroying' parts of its ecosystem. On the other hand, as stated by ASAECO, it aims, among others, to "contribute to better life standards of the local community, increase economic standards, improve sustainable and responsible environment, ecotourism, and agriculture and decrease poverty." [5] However, it is are often uncertain if these intentions are realized.

About the presence of ecotourism, María Elena notes that a "fundamental change of the entire system is needed" in order for it to succeed in Guatemala. She moves around on her chair a little, making it screech on the tile-floor, and looks out the window. "For example, Quetzales, Guatemala's national bird now facing extinction, used to live here (see Solórzano et al. 2003), on Cerro El Baúl [in Quetzaltanengo]. Not too long ago you could see them if you watched very carefully. I never have, but I have heard people telling stories about seeing Quetzales. Now they have constructed a road and the birds are gone. You would have to leave the city to see them." She picks up her steaming cup of coffee and stares at the black liquid for a few seconds as if contemplating the right words to say before continuing. "Since the 1990s tourism has changed in Xela. In Chile Verde [San Martín Sacatepéquez] as well! Ecotourism is hard to describe and to analyze. It is new for us and I understand it has done much in Costa Rica. A lot of people think tourism is bad; but it is just a clash of thoughts, of ideas and cultures, and of course it *has* caused problems. There are different ideas and goals indeed, tourism changes the situation. But is it all bad? I don't think so […]. On the one hand ecotourism helps to create a relation with the natural world, helps tourists to understand what we understand and how. But the people here in Guatemala aren't prepared yet. There is little to no education and there is not enough knowledge to make ecotourism sustainable for people *and* nature. All of this has changed a little since the founding of ASAECO, now there are at least people who are cleaning the roads, putting up signs and information, and guiding the tourists."

The general idea that indigenous communities would not be able to cope with the tourists flocking to 'their' lands, has been pointed out by Johnston (2006), who stresses that ecotourism is emerging so fast that it will overwhelm communities that 'own' the resource and lead to the loss of the initial resource itself. She continues by stating that travel agencies typically fail to recognize ancestral and/or sacred lands of indigenous communities and that in many cases these lands are vulnerable for being taken over by commercial companies. Exploitation and degradation of sacred lands are a concern of several *Ajq'ij'ab* who work at Laguna de Chicabal. Rodrigo says that the volcano is owned by the spirits and the spirits should be the ones that decide its boundaries, physical and non-physical. "Now roads have been constructed. Do people ask the spirits for permission to destroy nature? Is everybody entering the site asking for permission as they were asked to do? Do you not think *our* land is more and more becoming an economic product instead of a spiritual and sacred place?" When talking about the influence of ecotourism on natural sacred

places, Carlos, a Quetzaltenango-based tourist guide told me that the needs of 'the sacred' – in this case the indigenous community – and the tourism industry are unlikely to see eye to eye. "Everybody has different ways of identifying nature and making it the way that suits them best." The cases above illustrate how different views of nature shape different territorial narratives and how people decide what happens or should happen to a territory and in what way this should happen; indigenous groups, tourist agencies and ecotourists formulate narratives to 'claim' their spiritual or environmental rights to territory in which nature has a central place.

The socio-environmental struggles reflected in ecological indigenous and ecotourism narratives evolve further when the two are not only conflictive, but also intertwined. As shown above, both narratives are entangled as both groups both win and lose from each other's visions of what 'nature' entails. This is especially the case in Chicabal, where ecotourism has caused damage to nature (i.e. construction of roads, campsites, lodges, cars) as well as stimulated local indigenous groups to emphasize the sacredness of the volcano and their cultural and spiritual identity, and express the importance of nature within their worldview. At the same time, their rights and access to economic sources are limited as nearly all tourists depart from and return to Quetzaltenango, using tourist agencies and urban-based guides. The claiming of rights or access to the territory is first rooted in historical and cultural patterns such as ancestry and spirituality and second, outlined by environmental and legal 'boundaries'. The junction of this socio-environmental conflict and the coming together of these narratives was very eloquently and cynically framed by Carlos, who stated that all different environmentalisms meet as soon as people recognize the new god that entered the realm: "*el Dios Dinero es El que manda.*"

8. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we have shown how different territorial narratives encapsulate – and are part of negotiating – the meaning that is given to nature in the context of processes of globalization. In the Guatemalan Highlands, territorial narratives and different meanings of nature are constructed by a variety of actors that defend different positions regarding control over and connotations of territory and its natural resources in the broadest sense. We have demonstrated that the control over rights in a particular territory is not only a matter of different ideas and set boundaries, but also a complex and ambiguous negotiated process that takes place in different dimensions (Boelens 2008). Indigenous groups produce narratives to claim their spiritual, cultural and historical rights to territory in which nature plays a key role. Such cultural and spiritual territorial narratives often become more politicized when people not only attach spiritual, but also political or economic meanings to nature in order to 'gain control' over a certain territory. These narratives are constructed in the context of, and informed by, global tendencies such as massive resource extraction, ecotourism and the

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globalization of rights. Constructed by different actors, using different sets of beliefs and views in order to establish what they experience as 'nature', they represent different environmentalisms.

We have analyzed territorial narratives as being constructed on a field of force, that is, nature. Hereby we have looked into the different actors, interests and regulations that inform struggles over the meaning of nature. We have shown that a variety of actors engage in such negotiations: mining companies, the Guatemalan government, activists, spiritual leaders and tourists (agents). They all engage in constructing often conflictive territorial narratives in which they give diverging meanings to nature. These meanings are informed by the different interests that they have in the process of territorialization: profit, spiritual life, indigenous identity or making a living out of tourism. Negotiating such meanings of nature are about more than nature itself. It is about who has the right to decide about nature, about the regimes of representation (Boelens 2008). It has also become clear that such negotiations can only be understood by taking two extra elements into account: the socio-political history of Guatemala, characterized by violence and exclusion on the one hand and the globalized context of expanding massive resource extraction, the globalization of rights and ecotourism. These developments shape the negotiations of nature on the different levels of abstraction that have been developed by Boelens (2008) as the echelon of rights in various ways.

The actors that are involved in the negotiations on nature are present on multiple levels: one, government officials as well as environmental and indigenous activists on the national level, whose actions are informed by discourses of sustainable massive resource extraction (government) and the globalization of environmental and indigenous rights (activists). Two, local actors and their actions are shaped by globalized discourses of rights on the one hand and the global trend of ecotourism on the other. The way these actors frame and legitimize their narratives of nature are informed by the history of violence and exclusion. This contributes to the idea that the exploitation of nature is a new process of dispossession, which is an important element in the discourses of many indigenous activists. These globalized developments inform the way different actors claim their rights and employ local, customary, national and international rights discourses. In sum, territorial narratives that represent different environmentalisms are constructed on different levels and are informed by different processes of globalization.

At the same time, we have shown that territorial narratives are not only multi-layered and constructed along different scales, but also become more complex as we go from the national to the local level. Elements that might be taken for granted in one territorial narrative, such as 'ecotourism is good', as a way of legitimizing a discourse against mining, can be contested at the local level. The same goes for the sacred meanings of indigenous lands. Whereas sacredness and spirituality become politicized in the narrative 'nature as territory' and are often presented as uncontested elements of indigeneity at the national level, such categorizations might be contested as an essential element of Maya identity at the local level where people face poverty, (eco)tourists and are busy sustaining in their livelihoods. By unravelling territorial narratives along the different scales – from national to local – and by examining the different levels of abstraction in these narratives,

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inspired by Boelens' echelon of rights, we have shown that the varieties of environmentalisms are constructed on different scales and are informed by local as well as global processes and power relations in which the socio-political history of violence towards and the exclusion of the indigenous population plays a crucial role.

Endnotes

[1] We define the Maya Movement as the political mobilization of indigenous organizations, groups and institutions that, through their own efforts, attempt to transform the relationship between the indigenous population and the Guatemalan nation-state (Bastos & Camus, 2003: 7).

[2] http://www.mem.gob.gt/2012/05/17/seminario_energetico_petrolero_minero/

[3] In his critique on the MMSD, Whitmore (2006) argues that the report did not 'reflect those of its victims. This meant that MMSD did not gain broad acceptance or credibility as an independent body, and as a result the project failed to generate any meaningful dialogue between those most affected by mining and those most responsible.' (p. 310). See Starke and Brown (2002) for elaboration of the idea of Mining as sustainable development, Power (2002) for an analysis of mining of development that concludes that this is not a viable way to go.

[4] http://www.pcslatin.org/portal/images/documentos/Rotador/Julio-24-Fundacion-contra-terrorismo.jpg http://www.pcslatin.org/portal/index.php/recursos-y-analisis/sala-de-prensa/noticias/2009-antropologa-irma-alicia-velasquez-nimatuj-se-defiende-de-ataques

[5] http://www.lagunadechicabal.com

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